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ABSTRACT

A Madison School District (Phoenix, Arizona) program in which parent volunteers teach Spanish to fifth and sixth graders is described. The program originated with the author, who as a parent volunteer had been teaching Spanish to her child's class. First, a brief account is given of the history of foreign languages in the elementary school (FLES) and of currently used low-cost FLES methods. In the Madison School District, parent desire for a foreign language program was strong despite minimal financial resources and lack of appropriate instructional materials. In the middle school in question, the seventh- and eighth-grade Spanish teacher agreed to write 20 fifth- and sixth-grade lessons leading into the later curriculum, and parent volunteers were recruited through the school newspaper and parent-teacher association. Each volunteer received instruction on lesson presentation from the author and the Spanish teacher. Volunteers were found to be conscientious and committed, and the program became an opportunity for friendships and parent involvement. Challenges to be met included support of administration, teachers, and parents; parent preferences and conflicts; a malfunctioning copy machine; and a major cultural project--a school fiesta. A list of references and a sample lesson are included. (MSE)

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A PARENT VOLUNTEER PROGRAM FOR THE 5TH AND 6TH GRADES TO TEACH SPANISH: THE PHOENIX EXPERIMENT

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A PARENT VOLUNTEER FOREIGN LANGUAGE PROGRAM FOR 5th AND 6th GRADES: THE PHOENIX EXPERIMENT

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM:

Under the Carter Administration of 1983, suggestions were made by the National Commission on Excellence in Education (1979) to implement a foreign language program in all U.S. schools systems. In 1989, The Arizona State Board of Education mandated that foreign languages need to be implemented into the K-12 classrooms, but the mandate was put into effect without the necessary funding to facilitate its implementation. (1989) Complicating this matter was the lack of established FLES. (Foreign Language in the Elementary Schools) programs in the State of Arizona to serve as models of program development. In addition, only a few FLES classes in the school systems had been offered before or after school hours and no cultural awareness through FLES had been carried out. It was for these reasons that I came up with my volunteer program to teach foreign languages in the elementary schools.

A year and a half ago, I had a brainstorm to begin a parent volunteer foreign language program for the Madison school district in Phoenix, Arizona. I had been teaching Spanish as a Volunteer for four years in that district, and thought it would be a wonderful idea to share my program with all the students in the 5th and 6th grades instead of just my daughter's 5th grade class. There was no curriculum of any value that had been

written for 2nd to 6th grades, but I had spent an enormous amount of hours creating educational games and other learning experiences over the four years prior to that time. Considering these factors, and the prevalence of Spanish spoken in the Phoenix area, I thought that teaching this language in the classroom would be a worthwhile endeavor. This paper is an account of how I designed and implemented this project and overcame significant obstacles along the way.

REVIEW OF THE PAST AND PRESENT HISTORY OF FOREIGN LANGUAGE TAUGHT IN KINDERGARTEN THROUGH 6TH GRADES:

OVERVIEW OF THE 1950'S-1970'S:

The launching of Sputnik and the Cold War caused the teaching of foreign languages to gain government attention in the 1950- 1970's. People wanted to be able to communicate in all languages as space and other technologies were developing at a very rapid pace. In the 1950's, the federal government provided the National Defense Education Act to train foreign language teachers. (Hamayan, 1958)

According to Patterson, (1969) during this period some of the students were introduced to teaching the language via television. Classes for instance, would listen to a French teacher on T.V. twice weekly. After viewing the lesson, the class would respond to the T.V. Instructor's questions about the segment taught. The children's regular classroom teacher would listen and assist with eliciting correct responses. The problem with this type of approach was that it was difficult to

distinguish verbatim what the T.V. Educator was saying. The In the 1980's and's 1990's there seems to be a resurgence of classroom television was a distance away from the pupils' individual desks which made listening difficult. The T.V. Instructor could not tailor the lesson to fit the particular class environment that was being instructed. Moreover, the teachers in the regular classroom were generally not fluent or knew little if any of the language, and much confusion took place for both the Teacher and students. Most of the pupils retained simple phrases while others retained virtually nothing from this new advancement.

Another development during this era was to pull out the more advanced students, and give them foreign language instruction in a separate classroom. These programs were created for the 4th-6th grades. They consisted of grade level appropriate concepts from the High School texts. Funding was limited, and interest was lost. Perhaps the decisions of the Cold War disarmament agreements caused the overall foreign language thrust to be discontinued. Some parents felt this foreign language benefit should be made available to all children instead of the brightest disciplines. (Abramson, 1966)

In the 1970's, a study showed that intelligence played only a minor role in predicting the achievement of foreign language proficiency. The students' performance level was determined foremost by motivation with other factors of positive attitude to foreign languages and different cultures also playing a role.

(Genesee, 1976)

OVERVIEW OF THE 1980'S-1990'S:

In the 1980's and's 1990's there seems to be a resurgence of interest in learning foreign languages. Studies (Rafferty) are showing that pupils that take a foreign language excel better academically than their counterparts that do not partake in the same subject matter. In addition, the world is developing a global economy, and the need to be able to communicate is becoming increasingly more important. (Rafferty, 1986) Despite these factors, federal and local funding for FL programs has not been plentiful.

In the 1980's-1990's, foreign language is being presented to teach culture as well as to learn the way to converse in a second language. The innovative teaching approaches promote the use of foreign language for meaningful interaction. Hamayan (1986) believes that it will be many years before we will feel the effects of producing a generation that has grown up with foreign language training in all levels of the school system.

PRESENT LOW COST FLES METHODOLOGIES:

In the 1980's, some methods of implementing the teaching of foreign languages in the classroom were developed that do not require special funding. For instance, a new instructional modality was implemented entitled, "Think-pair-share." Students are taught to learn a foreign language in a conversational approach. This activity entails cooperative learning that allows students to participate in classroom

discussions and increase their opportunities to learn from each other using that foreign language. According to Lorenz, (1984) this process does not specify a group to be taught, grade level, teacher,or materials to be used nor does it have any flaws that were documented.

Another low cost method invites foreign workers to a foreign language classroom. This enables the pupils to practice speaking the language first-hand and to even learn an appreciation of other cultures. Here again, no special funding, teachers, materials, grade level or grouping is necessary. The only requirements are that the workers speak the language without grammatical errors and that they address the specific grade level concerns they are teaching. The philosophy could be utilized as an immersion concept since the worker-educator is from a country, and is visible throughout the school campus. (Described by Stern, 1984)

A low cost game concept, described by Pluto, (1984) can also be adapted in all aspects of the elementary school classroom. It is even recommended that pupils make their own games as they learn how to write, and read in the second language. This creates a fun, educational experience for the students. The games should be in both languages, and the teacher would need to process elementary skills in the language being taught. The funding traditionally only covers the art supplies, and district in-service training sessions that demonstrate how to help the students. It is less expensive to have the regular

classroom teacher use this type of an enrichment to the normal class activities rather than hire a special FLES teacher. In this manner, all students would be benefited by this program.

Other ways to incorporate foreign language instruction without extra funding would be to teach social studies and institute the study of the target culture in English. In addition, pupils with this type of background should be encouraged to bring family members into the classroom to speak and have discussions with the students. Projects could be assigned in which those students from bilingual backgrounds could involve grandparents and other family members. According to Dohrer, (1970) in the teaching of the target language, the outcomes of such a program could be exciting, however, it would need to be employed in a multi-cultural school population.

Many other ideas have been proposed to keep foreign language instruction in the classroom without increased funding. One is sharing visual aids and use of associated physical activities. Such kinesthetic approaches provide opportunities to make use of non-verbal cues to meaning, enliven the classroom and maximize learning. This can service all grade levels without hiring specialized FLES teachers; only additional instruction for the present teachers could be needed. This solution only requires an initial capital outlay of monies without further ongoing revenue spending. (Bohrer, 1970)

NEED FOR A CHANGE:

The district had surveyed the wants and needs from the

families of every student. Eighty eight per cent of the surveys indicated a strong desire for a foreign language program. I had been volunteering in my daughter's class for the last four years teaching Spanish at the primary school. (K-4) The state mandate was still in effect without financial support. There was no

money available for a FLES program in my daughter's school and no commercially available FLES curriculum materials. I felt that having parents come into the classroom to teach Spanish would be a good solution to the problem. It seemed the next step was to share my program with the middle school as my daughter would be starting the 5th grade. In other words, this program was a serendipitous idea for me to pursue this next step. Although this was the middle school serving grades 5-8th, the 5th and 6th grades did not have a foreign language curriculum. Since the 7th and 8th grade foreign language teacher, Mrs. Deborah Beresford, agreed to write materials a curriculum that would *stair step the classes into the Junior High Spanish class, Spanish was selected as the language to be taught to the 5th and 6th graders.

THE STRUCTURE OF THE PARENT VOLUNTEER SPANISH INSTRUCTION:

Each parent that volunteered to teach a class received instruction on how to present the lessons form Mrs. Beresford, the Junior High Spanish teacher and myself. Mrs. Phyllis

*stair step means to have enough information present to flow directly into the next level of higher learning skills.

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Schwartz, Madison Meadow's school principal, approved the curriculum for the students. Twenty lessons were written for the parents to follow. (Refer to appendix for sample lesson plan) Overhead transparencies, videos, listening tapes, worksheets, and any supplemental materials were applied as part of the lesson plan. As the Spanish lessons proceeded, the teachers acquired an appreciation of the parents' efforts, and agreed to extend the lessons and have the classes at the end of the school day if this accommodated the parent's schedules.

Parent volunteers were solicited in the school newspaper, and at PTA meetings. The parents who volunteered were conscientious and committed. If they were unable to make a lesson, they would arrange for another time with their respective classroom teacher. This became an opportunity for the parents to become involved with their children's education. They also met other parents that were involved with their children, and friendships were consummated. Parents also volunteered that did not have children in these grades because they felt that FLES was a valuable asset in their school.

CHALLENGES TO OVERCOME WITH THE PTA, ADMINISTRATION, TEACHERS, PARENTS, MACHINERY, AND THE FIESTA:

PTA:

There were a multitude of challenges to overcome to gain the support of the PTA, Administration, Teachers, Parents, Machinery, and the Fiesta. Before attempting this program, I made sure the PTA would give me their full support for these FLES classes.

They agreed to support this program if the administration would approve this program. Due to my obtaining PTA support initially, the program will continue this school year. In fact, the PTA is now recruiting parent volunteers and only a few parents will not be returning. All the parents expressed their enthusiasm about this program and personally extended their appreciation in being a part of this program. They applauded my efforts, and stated they enjoyed working with the children, and found it meaningful to give of themselves to teaching Spanish to the children of their school and community.

ADMINISTRATION, TEACHERS, AND PARENTS:

Many people questioned my motives for working diligently for free on a program of this caliber. However, I had been volunteering for the last four years in my daughter's class, and I knew they could not afford to start a program. In addition, there was skepticism on the part of the Teachers and Administration as to how parents could instruct these classes be reliable, and make the children enjoy this enrichment approach. The administration agreed to try out this program, but they were reluctant at best since no new program had been inserted into the curriculum on a volunteer foundation in years.

When any new program begins, it takes a tremendous amount of effort, and the only way it will be truly successful is if the person in charge gives of their time diligently. To establish this program, I spent 8-14 hours per week, which was a major

commitment to juggle with my teaching schedule, family, and personal time. Learning how to access the administrators, personnel, teachers when questions arose was another obstacle. This was resolved by meeting individually when I heard they were present. Also, I wrote letters which caught their attention. Unfortunately, there was a staff member through whom information had to be screened, and her uncooperative attitude at times posed much frustration. However, in every dimension of this program, my attitude was extremely positive, and it was easy to circumvent her help. Other problems included people forgetting their commitments and leaving me to fulfill their responsibilities. I repeatedly explained to these people the necessity in keeping of their commitments and that the school appreciated their help. Nevertheless, some parents preferred being in specific classes, and some of the teachers would not have parents coverage if their choices were not honored. As a result, a rescheduling nightmare was created from parents' selections of classes. Every parent was screened and a common bond was created. If two parents wanted the same class, they were alternated with another teacher, and taught in their requested classroom every other week. When the schedules were finally presented everyone was pleased.

THE COPY MACHINE:

The school had a dysfunctional xerox machine which had me make numerous unnecessary trips to the school. The

teachers, secretaries, and everyone else complained, but funding was limited.

THE FIESTA'S NEGATIVE AND POSITIVE ASPECTS:

THE FIESTA'S NEGATIVE ASPECTS:

The fiesta was perhaps the largest hurdle in this program's history. For four years, I had been in charge of putting on a fiesta in my daughter's class of 30 pupils. This time there were approximately 400 students, 25 teachers and administrators, and 60 parents. Since this was the first time the school had undertaken a novel idea of this nature, the teachers became confused. So everything possible was done to present this program in an organized manner. Every teacher was given a copy of the itinerary for the event. The parents that volunteered in the class that taught Spanish were to secure parent helpers and parents to bring in Spanish food. Parents forgot or did not show up or their children were absent. At one point in an hour's time, they were to have a grand fiesta with a pinata, Spanish Bingo, and food, but not enough time was available to carry this out. This experience really needed several directors besides a teacher, administrator and parent, but this time, the responsibility fell almost entirely on my shoulders. The entertainment canceled at the last minute, and finding a replacement for the group caused much frustration. A point worth mentioning is that the day before the fiesta, a staff member said in front of a class and a Spanish volunteer parent

that this fiesta was going to be "sheer chaos" and that all the teachers were " furious about this party." It was a difficult situation to tactfully handle since the prediction was so negative and required reassuring the classroom parent.

CORRECTING THE FIESTA'S PROBLEMS:

THE CHILDREN'S REACTIONS: THIS MADE IT WORTH THE CHAOS

Repeatedly, the children told me they had a "BALL" at the fiesta. The pressure was released for them with no school demands and they actually were able to socialize and even laugh with their peers at school. This was a chance to experience a "hands on" cultural exchange without tests or constant behavior restrictions. Their parents expressed how glad they were that their children could receive such a wonderful cultural experience. If the community is really there to help children, then I highly recommend this as the end of the year culminating Spanish instruction event.

ADULT REVISIONS:

To save the adults' sanity, next time there should be some revisions in the way things are carried out. The principal should spell out to the faculty every detail of the fiesta at a teacher's meeting before the event. A committee would need to be set up with someone to be in charge of food, entertainment and games. The game chairman would need to have a schedule for the pinata, and the exact location it will be held, and even a rainy day alternative schedule. Also, more time needs to be allowed

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for the fiesta itself. The Spanish volunteer parent needs to call every parent that signed up to volunteer, and be responsible for tying up any loose ends. The teachers need to handle class control. It might even be a good idea to have a meeting beforehand with the Spanish volunteers. There should be fewer problems when everyone knows the routine.

CONCLUSIONS:

In conclusion, this paper tried to cover the successes and mistakes made in this parent volunteer FLES program and suggest improvements. It is my fervent hope that other school districts follow this format and bring FLES into their community. Hopefully, the material presented will serve as a resource for introducing low cost FLES programs in a time when educational budgets have been tightened.

Curriculum can be found from local Hispanic newspapers. TV or Radio stations. There are many stationery, grocery, and or Radio stations. There are many stationery, grocery, and book stores which supply Spanish material. Many school districts teach ESL, and have numerous materials. Spread the word, FLES is possible with little if any type of funding!!!!!

CONCLUSION CONCERNING FOREIGN LANGUAGE INSTRUCTION IN THE U.S. SCHOOLS:

Many aspects of all these FLES programs need to be improved. First of all lack of funding constitutes the main obstacle to success followed by the lack of qualified personnel. Finally, more emphasis should be put on the fact that the need to

learn a foreign language has become paramount in our global economy. Uniformity of curriculum goals with every district in the U.S. that teaches foreign languages at the same grade level may even be a possibility on the near future with the creation of National Standards for foreign language instruction by ACTFL.

The volunteer programs are a good idea in theory, but families now need two incomes to survive which makes this idea somewhat difficult to achieve in practice. I recommend setting up these volunteer programs whenever funding is limited. Hiring a paid teacher coordinator would help because there is a considerable amount of time involved and someone with an elementary education degree should be able to answer questions in a more concise and knowledgeable manner. If adequate funding is available, than I recommend hiring a full time FLES teacher. Hamayan (1986) indicated that the sooner children are exposed to a foreign language, the more flexible and creative they become, and are able to reach higher levels of cognitive development at an earlier age vis-a-vis the pupils that have not been exposed to a different tongue. The use of games to explain and reinforce concepts in the elementary classroom has demonstrated excellent results, and should be pursued and continued.

All these programs need reinforcement on a daily basis. The success of such programs requires that people recognize the inadequacy of foreign language teaching for most Americans, and

then follow through in the implementation of such volunteer programs. Modern technology has expanded where people can see each other and converse by merely pushing a few buttons in seconds. However, without being able to communicate with them, in a common language other than English, all the new advances may be wasted.

The study of foreign languages enhances one's understanding of world culture and history. It also increases the potential for international commerce and thereby increases economic potential for all of us. We are now a global economy whose protagonists come from many cultural and ethnic backgrounds. Let us begin to make the teaching of foreign language in the elementary schools one of our educational priorities for the 21st century so that people from these different societies can communicate and cooperate for the good of all.

*From my research, I could only locate another program somewhat similar to mine in Orlando, Florida. The report of this program (Mabry, 1979) was found to be in the ERIC documents the summer of my completion of the Phoenix Experiment. "Un Poquito de Espanol has both parents and teachers come into the classroom to instruct Spanish. Since the report on this program was brief, I called for more information, but to date no response has been received.

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LESSON 1

Hola, Me Llamo

Present: Introduce yourself and tell the students who you are, why you are in the class and how frequently you will be coming. Then introduce yourself in Spanish.

Pronounce: Hola! Me llamo _____?
state name

Practice: Ask each of them to say
"Hola! Me llamo _____"

1. Practice as a class saying the phrase several times until they get used to how it feels and until most of the class is over being self-conscious.

2. Have each person introduce themselves. After each one introduces themself you say,
"con mucho gusto"
(They will not say this but they will know the appropriate response.)

THANK YOU

Mrs. Deborah Beresford
Mrs. Phyllis Schwartz
Ms. Karolee Hess
Dr. Barbara Lafford
Dr. Frank W. Canady
Mrs. Debbie Weintraub
Mrs. Gloria Lowen

The Teachers of Madison Meadows.
The parents that volunteered to teach Spanish at Madison Meadows.
The students of Madison Meadows.
The PTA of Madison Meadows.